

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. When should we put our purple martin house up? Our neighbor says he has seen a “scout”.

A. I put mine up whenever I see martins in the neighborhood or on March 1, whatever comes first. Such a strategy has worked well for me. I am resigned to the presence of one or two English sparrow pairs in every house. The purple martins seem to ignore them. It is not worth the work to put the houses up and then lower them again if sparrows move in.

Q. Where have all the winter weeds gone? Last year at this time we had bedstraw, horseherb, and rescue grass. Now we only have some henbit.

A. The cold weather has slowed the weed germination, but they will be coming. One product that seems to work in the lawn is “Over-the-Top”. If the henbit is in the lawn, apply it as per the label instructions. The product is more tolerant of cool weather than other broad-leaf herbicides. When the rest of the broad-leaf weeds (thistle, dandelion, bedstraw, and horseherb do sprout, apply it to the young plants.

Q. Our broccoli looks a little gray from the cold weather, but it is producing heads. Unfortunately, the heads are dry and tough. Will they improve, or should we remove the plants?

A. I would cut and discard the heads that look or are dry, and see if the plant produces new heads. Leave some of the small heads and see if they develop better now that temperatures have become milder. Make sure the plants are getting enough water.

Q. My peach trees are already showing color on the swelling buds. That is good except we have not pruned them yet. We are inclined to do without pruning this year. What do you think?

A. Fruit trees can be pruned with swollen buds and even with open blooms. At least thin the middle of the trees out some, remove dead wood, and remove crossing branches. It gets harder every year if you skip pruning. Leaving too many fruit bearing branches can lead to broken branches and low-quality fruit.

Q. Our snapdragons and dianthus are showing flower buds, but the alyssum, stocks, and calendula look dead. Should we just wait until April until we can plant zinnias to fill their place in the flower garden?

A. That is one tactic. Another option is to obtain some new cool weather plants in full bloom from the nursery. Stocks, calendula and alyssum should bloom into late May. You could also consider planting Laura Bush, Wave or Cascade petunias. They will bloom long into the summer.